

# The Essence of Prayer

*from Prayer by Friedrich Heiler*

Prayer appears in history in an astonishing multiplicity of forms;

As the calm collectedness of a devout individual soul, and as the ceremonial liturgy of a great congregation;

As an original creation of a religious genius, and as an imitation on the part of a simple, average religious person;

As the spontaneous expression of upspringing religious experiences, and as the mechanical recitation of an incomprehensible formula;

As bliss and ecstasy of heart, and as painful fulfillment of the law;

As the involuntary discharge of an overwhelming emotion, and as the voluntary concentration on a religious object;

As loud shouting and crying, and as still, silent absorption;

As artistic poetry, and as stammering speech;

As the flight of the spirit to the supreme Light, and as a cry out of the deep distress of the heart;

As joyous thanksgiving and ecstatic praise, and as humble supplication for forgiveness and compassion;

As a childlike entreaty for life, health, and happiness, and as an earnest desire for power in the moral struggle of existence;

As a simple petition for daily bread, and as an all-consuming yearning for God Himself;

As a selfish wish, and as an unselfish solicitude for a brother;

As wild cursing and vengeful thirst, and as heroic intercession for personal enemies and persecutors;

As a stormy clamor and demand, and as joyful renunciation and holy serenity;

As a desire to change God's will and make it chime with our petty wishes, and as a self-forgetting vision of and surrender to the Highest Good;

As the timid entreaty of the sinner before a stern judge, and as the trustful talk of a child with a kind father;

As swelling phrases of politeness and flattery before an unapproachable King, and as a free outpouring in the presence of a friend who cares;

As the humble petition of a servant to a powerful master, and as the ecstatic converse of the bride with the heavenly Bridegroom.